



The Upper Room

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Everything had stopped. The disciples were frozen. Trapped by their own inertia. Closed in behind locked doors and paralysed by their fear. If we listen hard enough we can almost hear their sharp intake of breath as they stare at one another in their freeze response: What just happened? What will happen now?

There have been many times this past year that my own freeze response has kicked in as I have been sitting in my oratory trying to pray, locked away - though not through choice but locked away nonetheless. At times I have been trapped by my own inertia, not knowing what to pray for. What just happened? What will happen now?

The Upper Room. They had been hidden away in a dead space, stuffy and lifeless with the doors locked and windows closed there would have been very little light to see and no fresh air to cool their confusion; they were still in the tomb, disoriented and confused.

Then the Jesus to whom no door is locked appeared. And we hear the words which we now long for expectantly: “Peace be with you” His first words said again to his confused disciples, words that breathed into and interrupted and dissipated their fears. With those words he tells them and us, you are loved. It is as if with just a few words as he had opened his arms wide upon the cross he was now flinging open the doors and windows to let the fresh air in. They would have been like healing music. The words were an out-flowing of breath and I wonder if the disciples’ response was to finally be able to exhale deeply, before breathing in the life-breath that was now filling the room.

From the once lifeless scene of the Pieta, Christ had come and now moved among them.

What was seemingly lifeless became breath.
Hearts moved and rejoiced.

It was a new Genesis – Jesus breathed on them and it was so – just as God had breathed over the waters in the very beginning. The music of creation could be heard and felt again.

In my extended time in the oratory, disconnected and disheartened, I found that somehow through my prayers and times of somewhat stunned silence a word, a phrase was emerging “*shalom aleichem*”. Jesus had broken through the closed door. At first what I heard was breathless, like a whisper, no form or substance and some days it was all I could do to hear it through the deadness, but I found that it grew in strength over time until it was clear. I realised all I had to do was to respond with the same – it was breathy, but in a different way, not breath-less but heavy, thick with

love, a love that was bursting to be out in the community. So I opened the window and responded...

Like the dynamics of a song, we breathe in intentionally to then breathe out taking the note in its direction of travel.

When we say the word peace to one another it is on an outward breath, in whatever language we use it is an exhalation, it has a movement, a direction. It is not a short, clipped word that is said through tight lips but one that expands outwards in all directions.

Thinking about the power of breath, it's movement and direction of travel during a time when perhaps talking about breath is difficult – when it is seen as the carrier, a major cause in the spread of disease. It is considered dangerous.

And indeed, dangerous it is – Christ's breathing of peace over the disciples is quickly followed by a sending out. "Do this" Take this breath and breathe more life – into forgiveness, into action, into movement. Follow the intentional direction of the breath. Do not stay here.

And so for the disciples, that movement was to reorient themselves to Christ. In the images we have seen we can see the disciples are turned towards him. There is unity again.

These are not static images, in them we can see the disciples loving response to Christ and so we are also drawn towards Him, their movement becomes ours.

Peace be with you. You are loved.

Things cannot remain the same when the life-giving breath, breathing love and forgiveness bids us live and love and move.